

Self-Empowerment

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The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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IMPERMANENCE

It may be a difficult pill to swallow, but anything that is physical is impermanent, temporary. It will break down, pass away. The body that sat in a chair while writing this article will die some day. As far as I know, it cannot be avoided.

We are bound to experience losses and changes in this life. How shall we relate to those experiences? That depends on the consciousness we bring to the experience. When we are identified with our body, possessions, thoughts, and roles – what some call ego identification – we react with resistance, sadness, anger, fear, guilt, and resentment. When we are identified with our spiritual nature, we respond with acceptance, patience, and compassion. For those of us who are a complex embodiment of both ego and spirit, there can be a unique mixture of both responses, possibly a flip-flop back and forth between difficult emotions and greater wisdom while moving through a grieving process.

Grief is a normal response to loss and change. We lose people and things at different times in our lives, in different ways. People die, divorce, or move away. We lose jobs, money, abilities, or security. There are crimes committed against us or loved ones. Accidents happen. Age or illness may alter a life in unimaginable ways.

I knew a woman who longingly missed being pregnant. Before giving birth to her much loved daughter, she received more positive attention and strangers' friendliness than she had ever had before, and she sorely missed it. For several months she had enjoyed being a "star."

Loss of independence

My 88 year old father recently had the experience of giving up his car and becoming "dependent" on others to do things for him that he used to do for himself and others. For many of his retirement years he drove people to medical appointments and grocery shopping. Now he relies on others, having to receive the service he used to give.

The loss of one's independence is usually an unhappy transition, as we so highly value our youth and independence. Yet, no matter how commonly it is

experienced, people still resist when it happens to them, going through a grief process for the younger and stronger self. Yet, a new stage of being can be experienced as a blessing instead of a curse.

Painful thoughts and feelings

Have you ever had thoughts or feelings of hopelessness, fear, guilt, shame, sadness, anger, or catastrophic loss? Many of us go through a period of suffering in the swamplands of pain or despair, but usually move on to a period of growth or recovery. Often, people who have suffered will find a new sense of purpose or compassion. But there are some who struggle so hard, unable to get beyond a seemingly endless downward spiral, possibly leading to substance abuse or some form of self-destruction.

Two of my friends have experienced the tragic loss of a family member to suicide. Those close to their loved ones had little to no advance warning of the final desperate act that was to devastate and grieve their family, friends, and co-workers. Through autopsy, one was found to have suffered a frontal lobe stroke that accounted for the sudden mental and emotional change that triggered the suicide act.

In this issue Janet Berkowitz shares some of her experience, strength, and hope in recovery from being obsessed with suicidal thoughts for many years. There is no single easy one-size-fits-all answer, but there is help.

There is a proverb that *each of us is like all others, some others, and no others*. Our grief, experiences of loss, and painful thoughts and feelings have some aspects that are universal, some aspects that are shared with others, and some aspects that are unique to our individual being. Regardless of who understands and shares our journey, ultimately it is up to each of us to find acceptance of our impermanence in our own way.

Acceptance

Dr. Kübler-Ross described five stages of grief that included denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Of these five, four are classic ego reactions of resistance, and only the last one is a response of spiritual wisdom. It is in some form of acceptance that we experience peace. Yet, it is important to be where you are, feel what you feel, allowing the emergence of healing in its time to lead to acceptance and peace.

The Supremes sang “You can’t hurry love.” Maybe you can’t hurry healing either. But there are some things that you *can* do that support the healing process.

* Seek spiritual support – Prayer and meditation are inner-directed actions that feed the soul. Pastoral counseling or therapy can be highly supportive from the outside.

* Diet and Exercise – Eating good foods and engaging in healthy physical activities are an essential support for the physical body.

* Consider journaling your thoughts and feelings.

* Read books, poetry, or blogs that support your healing process.

* Let yourself feel your feelings. Nurture patience and self-love as you find your individual path.

* Open to a new level of awareness, compassion, and connection with life.

* Remember to laugh – It’s been said that humor is tragedy plus time. They also say that laughter is the best medicine. It’s not for everybody, but remembering to laugh just might soften the edge of the existential crisis we all face through our mortality.

Being in a relationship of acceptance with impermanence is not just about accepting the fact that we will die some day. It is being fully with all the ways that our circumstances, possessions, and relationships are in a state of change, movement, flux, and even appearance and disappearance. How do we live with that in a graceful way? How do we find the inner strength to meet impermanence with courage, love, and lightheartedness? Listen within for the answers that emerge for you. Maybe this newsletter will inspire you.

While the ego may be on full tilt with the drama and fear of impermanence, our wise Higher Self patiently waits for us to feel/hear its message. It might say, “I am here with you, loving and blessing you on your journey home.” Or it might say, “Be present, breathe, and enjoy every sandwich.”

Blessings for the Road Home

May you find the balance between activity and quiet so you can be attentive to your feelings. May your fears and hurts be acknowledged and set free. May you welcome the tears and the laughter, knowing all feelings are welcome here. May you be gentle with yourself. May you appreciate the beauty and fragility of each moment. May you rest in an awareness of a Love that is stronger than death.

Peace, Blessings, and Love to you and yours.

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*

Offering from Terrie Lewine

Below I offer you the lyrics of a song that plays on occasion in my chiropractic office – *Deathbed Song*, by Kirtana. It speaks to an idea very close to my heart these days which is: Life is short – are you doing, thinking, being all that you want? My hope is that we all understand more and more that we are responsible for how our life goes. How we speak to others, how much we go for in terms of our dreams. Are you playing small? Are you asking for all that you want? Are you willing to take a break, slow down and check in and see what's next in your life? Are you intentional and mindful and grateful about life? Saying yes to those questions can be powerful and fulfilling!

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Deathbed Song

© 2007 Kirtana

If I had the chance to live life over,
I would go more slowly - that's for sure.
I wouldn't put up such a fight
to have my way or prove I'm right
or overlay the world with my agenda.

I would open each day like a present,
tender toward what ever came my way -
every texture - joy or pain -
searing sun or healing rain,
for I have seen the masks of my Beloved.

I would not be so restless,
so eager to mess with
the nectar of what is
that I over-think the kiss
or turn my mouth away.

I would not take a single breath for granted.
And I would spend much more time on my
knees.

For once you've strewn the ashes of
the bodies of the ones you love,
you learn something about what really
matters.

And I know that love is worth the wounding
And that this dance is too brief to sit
through.

So even though my heart would break,
what a deep, exquisite ache.
I would always be a fool for love.

THE POWER OF PRAYER

by Janet Berkowitz

The power of prayer! They call it that for a reason. It works...like a wonderful and mysterious charm. It certainly did for me.

From 2007 to early 2011, I had been dangerously depressed on and off, mostly on. All day and night long I would hear the endless, racing droning of the word 'suicide' in my head. This had occurred quite a number of times before, starting at age 8, when I was brutally teased. But it hadn't ever lasted for more than a year. I never really wanted to actually do it. I had come to love life as an adult. I just wanted to stop the pain. Besides, I was terrified of what lay on the "other side" of death. Since 1984, when I found *A Course in Miracles*, which teaches that only love is real, I came to believe that death isn't real. I feared being only a sickened mind floating around, possibly facing reincarnation as a fly.

This last bout of depression was the worst. I came closer to attempting suicide than ever before. When therapists asked why, there was no obvious answer. They chalked it up to Bipolar Disorder, OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) and Borderline Personality Disorder. They dug into my past and my relationship with my parents. They tweaked my medications repeatedly (since 1980 I've been on about 75% of the psyche drugs available). I voluntarily hospitalized myself many times (three times in a fourteen month period in 2008-09) and received 25 shock treatments over a six month period (2008-09). This didn't help much, or did help only temporarily. I had tried multiple forms of natural and spiritual healing like acupuncture, reiki, and affirmations. I turned to fortune tellers, astrologers, and modalities whose names I can't even recall. I had done the daily lessons in *A Course in Miracles* at least twice and even lived in community dedicated to its teachings. It's not easy being suicidal when you view the body as an illusion (a primary message of 'the Course'). I was living in such constant terror that my doctor wanted to commit me to a state hospital. I feared spending the rest of my life in a straight jacket, locked in a padded cell. I lied to get out of that situation. I never felt so alone, even with many loving people around me.

Then, in 2010, I started hearing another voice in my head that kept saying, "Don't be a victim. Do something to address the issue of suicide. Use your talents to heal the problem." And similar to the voice in *Field of Dreams*, my inner voice said, "Build it and they will come." I am an artist, mime and drama teacher and I knew that I could bring all of that to the

mental health field, which desperately needs some lightening up. I called all over the country, but could not find anything for those who were suicidal, only groups for those who lost someone to suicide. I tried starting my own group online, but to no avail.

Finally, I discovered Suicide Anonymous, founded by a psychiatrist, who'd attempted suicide seven times, before he began to pray to a Higher Power (the term for God used in Alcoholics Anonymous). As he applied the 12 Steps of A.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous) to his life, he healed. I was very familiar with the 12 Steps myself, having gotten clean and sober in 1987 with the help of A.A. and other 12 Step groups.

So I started a Suicide Anonymous meeting in Philadelphia. Then I started one in Westampton, NJ with my husband, who'd made a suicide attempt once himself. Now, we have started another Suicide Anonymous meeting at The Starting Point in Westmont, NJ. This has been such a safe haven in which to share my deepest darkest thoughts and feelings. He and I also created a workshop called, *Creative Crisis Care: Taking Suicide Out of The Closet*, which uses the arts and interactive exercises to approach the topic.

All of this was helping my mental health but I kept falling back into periods of extreme fear. Then one night I rolled out of bed and called out to God, "Please help me." The next morning I felt the slightest bit better. I kept experimenting with this practice of prayer, which was relatively new in my life. One morning I awoke feeling so happy to be alive. For several months now, I've been really working on the first three steps of the 12 Steps, which are about establishing a constant contact with my understanding of a Higher Power.

There are infinite ways to reach a Higher Power and infinite concepts of what a Higher Power is. Sometimes for fun, I imagine myself sitting in an old diner, talking to this imaginary chef. He's this big guy with a scraggly beard, whom I named GUS (God in Us) and he gives me spiritual advice.

For now a simple daily diet of prayer is what keeps me afloat. I recently recalled a visit to a mental hospital in 1987 for suicidal depression. I awoke every morning at 3:20 am on the dot, but was not allowed to leave the room or turn on the lights. The only thing I could think of doing was to get on my knees and pray. I'd ask God to heal me so I could help others with similar issues. Here I am, 25 years later, answering my own prayers. Now that's the power of prayer!

For more information about Suicide Anonymous or Janet's workshops and performances (mime pieces about mental health issues) call 856-266-0709. Visit her facebook page "Creative Communication Builders" and her website: www.creativecommunicationbuilders.com

FACE OF GOD

by Janet Berkowitz

You are the face of God and you don't even know it,
Or maybe you do but choose not to show it.

You are as holy as the sun is bright.
You give the world your magnificent light.

Even if it's under a bushel,
It still shines 'cause it's so crucial.

And your part in this incredible whole,
Is just as needed to heal the world's soul.

If you could just get it that one plus one is one,
I guarantee you'd have more fun.

Be like the ocean, ever moving.
Keep your heart big and grooving.

Know that I am always here,
Ready to soak up every joy and tear.

Leap to the sky with all your might.
Feel my love holding you ever so tight.

Love, God



The Courage To Laugh: Humor, Hope, and Healing In the Face of Death and Dying

by Allen Klein © 1998 Penguin Putnam

Editorial Review From Publishers Weekly:

After his wife died from a rare liver disease, Klein wrote *The Healing Power of Humor*, which explained how laughter had helped him recover from her untimely death. Calling himself a "jollytologist," the author, who lectures and leads seminars on humor, enlarges on this earlier theme by presenting a welcome compilation of many personal stories culled from his research into death and dying. These show the important role of laughter as well as tears in the grieving process. Although Klein stresses that humor should not be used to cover up grief, he believes that, for the patient as well as loved ones, appropriate laughter is a refreshing and therapeutic tonic in the face of illness and death. Among the examples he provides are the sustaining power of humor for the terminally ill living in hospices, as well as the amazing capacity of AIDS patients to make jokes that ease their pain ("In my condition, I

don't even buy green bananas anymore"). He describes the bravery of very sick children who seek out light moments to help them cope with their disease and includes the experiences of concentration camp survivors who sustained their will to live through humor. Never glib, Klein's affirmations allow a crucial measure of relief for moments of distress, or in the face of loss.

Available through Amazon.com and Barnes&Noble.

Battling Cancer With T-Shirts And Laughter

Twenty-nine years ago, Linda Hill sat in a cancer center in California waiting for her first round of chemotherapy. She was 19 and had a softball-sized tumor in her chest and a diagnosis of Hodgkin's lymphoma. Hill's parents were told it was time to have their daughter do things she'd always wanted to do because she seemed to have little time left.

"I had it everywhere," recalls Hill, now 48. "I had it in all my lymph glands — head to toe — and so it was quite serious." Hill noticed something about the other cancer patients in the waiting room, most of whom were quite a bit older: "They were all just angry and bitter and sad," she says. "And I thought, 'I don't want to live like that. I don't want my kids to remember me that way.'"

Laughing At Cancer With Zingers

Three decades, seven kids and three more devastating cancers later, Hill has found a way to keep anger, bitterness and sadness at bay. She laughs at cancer and all it has taken from her, including her thyroid, spleen, colon and breasts.

In fact, when we met in the ornate wood-lined lobby of the Huntsman Cancer Institute in Salt Lake City, Hill wore a faded green long-sleeve T-shirt with these embroidered words: "I lost my colon ... but I'm still full of crap!" The aphorism is just one of many cancer zingers that Hill has created for a T-shirt business that focuses on helping cancer patients cope. She chuckles as she browses her T-shirt display just outside the institute's gift shop. "This is our No. 1 seller," she laughs, as she pulls a mustard-colored shirt from the rack that features this message: "Of course they're fake, the real ones tried to kill me!" The one-liners flow from the single mom, her five daughters and two sons. This is a family of practical jokers looking for laughs in the oddest places. Hill

once put bouillon cubes in a shower head so the kids were sprayed with chicken broth. And when the family chooses sides for games, there's always one child protesting: "I don't want Mom. She doesn't have a colon!"

Battling Thyroid, Breast And Colon Cancer

So the Hills couldn't help themselves when mom faced thyroid, breast and colon cancer — all in the past six years. As Linda was wheeled into surgery for a double mastectomy, a petite daughter tenderly whispered to her mom: "Thanks so much for making me NOT the smallest-breasted person" in the family.

With five girls, the breast lines snowballed. "You're going to have to date guys who like butts and thighs," the daughters joked. Two daughters, described by Hill as "rather well-endowed," told her, "Guys are going to look you in the eye now, Mom."

Hill remembers thinking, "We ought to put these things on shirts, because this is just so funny." Now, 800 T-shirts later, Hill has developed a fledgling market that helps patients laugh through chemo. The shirts are sold for about \$25 on Hill's Web site, and at cancer centers across the country. "Everybody has their own way of getting through things," explains Hill. "This just must be my way of doing it."

Ongoing Treatment

Hill is still being treated for breast cancer. So the jokes just keep on coming. "They took a lump from my breast, so why not my thigh?" another favorite shirt says, prompting another laugh from Hill. "There's not a woman on the planet that doesn't relate to that one," she says. She pulls others from the rack outside the gift shop. "This is a great one," Hill chuckles, reading the line a daughter wrote: "Mastectomy: \$12,000. Radiation: \$30,000. Chemotherapy: \$11,000. Never wearing a bra again: Priceless." Gift shop manager Dianne Rydman watches the reactions of patients. "We have a lot of people in here who don't laugh about a lot," says Rydman. "And they can sit out there and chuckle over that basket of shirts." Some of the shirts have serious themes, including: "Blue eyes run in your family. Cancer runs in mine," or "Cancer took her life. It never touched her spirit." Hill's smile fades as she pauses to consider those words. "Cancer does not define us," Hill asserts. "It's not my colon that

makes me love to bake. It's not my breasts that make me crazy and outgoing. And it wasn't my thyroid that gave me my faith in God." But the smile returns as she reminds herself of all those body parts lost to cancer. "At least I've had cancer on parts you can remove," she jokes. "It's a brutal weight loss program."

Despite Losses, A Cancer Celebrity

Hill's brand of chemo comedy isn't making money. She says she's \$7,000 in debt, but still donates \$2 from every sale to the Huntsman Cancer Institute. She's not quitting her day job as a fresh produce manager for a food distributor. She's also become a bit of a cancer celebrity at the institute. Multiple primary cancers occur in only about 8 percent of cancer survivors, according to the American Cancer Society. And Hill's pattern of cancers illustrates a phenomenon researchers have



documented. At Huntsman, she says, she's so prolific, researchers line up for blood and tissue samples after her procedures and surgeries. "I can make a cancer cell, and I can make it fast!" Hill boasts. And she's survived longer than expected. Hill's voice breaks again and tears flow as she describes the milestones she has managed to reach, despite all those cancers. "I'm going to be a grandma," she says, gulping for breath. "I saw another daughter get

married. And I saw another football season of my son. I've got another graduating and going to college." Hill is almost whispering when she says: "And I'd rather they remember me having fun." She adds, "I can have a normal life and just joke about everything. Maybe it's my way of dodging death." Hill quickly composes herself and gets back to the jokes, revealing the zingers to come. "We've got one," she says, chuckling again, "that's going to look like a rearview mirror of a car that says, 'Objects in shirt are smaller than they appear.'" Hill is also hearing from people with cancers yet to make it on her shirts. Ovarian and pancreatic jokes are on the way. But Hill's best line isn't on any shirt. She uses it to describe herself. "I'm so much more than a boob," she laughs. "I'm so much more than cancer."

*National Public Radio, December 15, 2009
Visit www.SomuchMoreOnline.com*

Daily Word

I find comfort in the love of God.

Life may be difficult when faced with certain events. I may seek comfort when challenged by the loss of a job, a health crisis or the need to let go of a cherished dream. Temporarily, I may find comfort in things or people. However, true and lasting comfort comes from the love of God within.

In a quiet moment, I find a place for rest. I still my thoughts and empty my mind of the chaos of fear, doubt and pain. In the silence is the love, peace and comfort I seek. In the silence I remember I am forever the child of a loving Creator. Never abandoned or left alone, I am loved. Strengthened by the comfort of Spirit that is always available to me, I move through any challenge with grace.

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